

Summary

NPS Winter Use Roving Team Meeting with Montana

Date: September 22, 2005

Location: Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission Room, Helena, MT

Present: Betsy Baumgart, Nedra Chandler, Elton Erp, Pat Flowers, Ray Heagney, John Keck, Lou Moore, Gary Pollock, John Sacklin, Kevin Schneider, Denice Swanke, Bob Walker

1) Purpose agency/group or NPS gave for wanting a visit at this time:

“briefing on the proposed EIS, history of this issue and current legal actions related to winter use that are pending” (from Flowers’ email to invitees).

2) Results of this meeting and/or next steps:

Information sharing – some new practices starting now and in October

1. NPS (Denise Swanke) will create a table format that shows each monitoring report sent to states and other reviewers, note when each was sent, and when comments are due, whether or not comments have been received on each, and then share that on a regular basis with the MOU primary contacts.
2. NPS will send the reports electronically – in PDF files to make them easy to forward and share. NPS will continue to send Pat Flowers one hard copy at the same time.
3. Montana noted it would be helpful to see the comments of other reviewers in order to consider and respond to those. NPS will share the written comments of other reviewers electronically as well – either by scanning these comments into a file, or by sending along what the reviewers deliver in writing.
4. NPS noted that once all comments are reconciled on the monitoring reports, those reports will be posted on the NPS website and available there too.
5. Montana (Pat Flowers) wondered who should get soundscapes report. The team suggested someone in Labor or Commerce with OSHA experience.
6. NPS (John Keck) asked if it would be helpful for all cooperating agency participants to have group email and phone lists in order to communicate independently with one another. The answer was yes. NPS will list and share the known names with all cooperators and then states and counties and federal cooperators can add additional names to make their own distribution lists as they see fit – maximizing information sharing, minimizing NPS mail list management work, and minimizing the potential for NPS to become bottleneck with

information if all communication were to go through them. Make information as direct and immediate as possible.

7. Cadence will send the slightly revised MOU text to Pat Flowers so Montana can finish its legal review and route it for signature. (The group discussed the expectation that modeling assumptions are important for particular cooperating agency participants to review and comment on, and this could either be called out specifically in the MOU, or clearly understood between each cooperator and NPS. NPS also pointed out they want that feedback, and have built it into contracts that contractors will check modeling assumptions with specific state agency contacts.)

Other

1. Montana (Pat Flowers) will send the Montana team a group email prompting their ideas about any specific elements, components or pieces each thinks NPS should address somewhere in the document. These will be routed back to Pat and sent to NPS by mid-October and feed the NPS work as they develop alternatives.
2. Montana (Lou Moore, DEQ) will submit a proposal to NPS outlining the financial assistance DEQ will need to create a second air quality monitoring station. NPS hopes to have the station in place by summer 2006.
3. Montana likes the idea of another face-to-face meeting at the DEIS stage with NPS and other cooperators so they can hear one another and provide input at that time. NPS is considering the details now of how to implement the agency and public participation plan over the next six month period, so this will be a suggestion in front of interdisciplinary team tomorrow.

3) Points raised:

- Monitoring reports typically go to 6 or 8 reviewers (e.g., state, outside technical, Southwest Research Institute, manufacturers)
- Montana commented on how unexpected some of the air quality emissions data on snowcoaches appeared, and talked with NPS about bringing a technical group together with Montana DEQ, Xanterra, others to, for example, look at what best available snowcoach technology ought to be.
- Six themes that came out of Cadence interviews are accurate.
- Don't understand all the legal maneuvers on past decisions. Difficult to follow. Hope next decision is easier to defend.
- Important for states to communicate with local constituencies about how the whole palette of alternatives must be included in new EIS so they should expect to see that and not assume NPS has already made up their mind.

- From state: coaches are where the emphasis ought to be.
- Personal anecdote, as a skier last winter, found the snowcoaches more annoying than the snowmobiles: louder, faster, bigger, careless with the ski tracks. Consider separating use by time of day. Especially having clear window to ski when coaches not around.

4) Questions asked:

- What kind of traffic are you seeing at these different entrances?
- What's non-commercial guiding?
- Are the expectations the same for guided as unguided (speed limits, hours of operations etc.)? (yes)
- Will the Gates report show up in refereed, peer reviewed literature?
- How different is 2004 decision from 2003 decision?
- What's the NPS contingency plan for when you get sued on this one?
- Would a fallback strategy be to get with congressional delegation and make the plan happen legislatively?
- Does NPS have a list of all reports that will be coming out or do you know them?
- Regarding air quality monitoring in West Yellowstone. How can NPS help financially with second station?
- Anything new under the sun for the new EIS? (e.g., looking at seasonal rather than daily totals of snowmobile or snowcoach visitors)? Initial positive state response to that because total number does become more important than per day (e.g., in terms of depositions of pollutants in snowpack for example).
- Will NPS look at Gallatin travel plan and how snowmobiles approach that northern boundary? Some of those trails coming north are right up against the park. Some of the topography will limit use, some may encourage use.
- Does NPS do any grooming in the park just for skiing?

5) Parting Comments

Glad we met today -- helpful and clarifying on several issues.

